

includes a large number of colour images of all species indicating patterns and colours attributable to individual species which will surely aid and assist observers.

Part 2 constitutes a handbook providing detail about each species. Birds are separated into nine subgroups, each having an introduction followed by detailed information not included within Part 1. Much has been previously published, but the gems are new data incorporated within this text. As in the introductory paragraphs, information on characteristics, diet, behaviour and threats and conservation are presented, although now these comments are directed to individual subgroups/species.

Birds of Prey of Australia concludes with chapters summarising its content and listing numerous references. The 13 chapters cover aspects as varied as conservation, human impacts, pests and pollution. A glossary and literature list follow, each well researched and presented. Overall the book supplies a welcoming market and is a volume that every avid bird researcher (amateur or professional) should have readily available. Information is easily gleaned; illustrations cover all aspects of field identification and provide extremely useful information at home or work—especially where injured birds are presented for rehabilitation. The price is comparable to that of similar works on other subjects and is not daunting. It is a worthy replacement for the first edition.

Those are the good points. The not so good aspects are (once again) the book's size: unless you have a backpack it is a difficult size to carry if it really is intended to be a 'field guide'. Within the pages there is repetition and the author appears to have a long-held grievance against windfarms. These modern engineering developments are dotting the landscape in areas also occupied by birds of prey. Simply, the two do not mix but until proper studies are concluded it is not worthy continuing to write on subjects that have little basic study here in Australia. Firm evidence should be obtained and published to back up future comments. Page 58 has a section 'Unconfirmed vagrants'. I often see similar sections in books and articles offering information on what was or might be (I am guilty of it myself). Surely these species can be ignored until substantive confirmation is obtained, for instance a standard similar to the international convention that if an animal hasn't been seen for 50 years it is considered to be extinct. The obvious erroneous record of *Butastur teesa* could be removed; if another appears then by all means reintroduce the original record.

NW Longmore

Bird Section, Museum Victoria
GPO Box 666
Melbourne 3001

Australian Lizards: A Natural History

by Steve K Wilson

Publisher: CSIRO Publishing, Collingwood, Victoria, 2012. 196 pages, paperback, colour illustrations. ISBN 9780643106406. RRP \$49.95

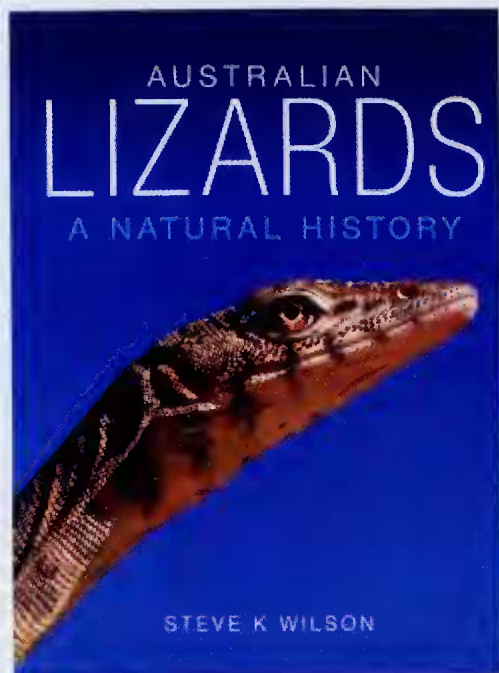
A childhood encounter with a lizard made an indelible impression on Steve Wilson, as it has done for many kids. That this quickly turned into a passion, and thence into obsession, was undoubtedly facilitated by the fact, demonstrated early in his latest book *Australian Lizards: a natural history*, that lizards can be found almost everywhere in this country, except in the most urbanised southern cities.

Wilson is the author of several books, most notably the national field guide *A Complete Guide to Reptiles of Australia*, which is updated every few years to keep up with the latest taxonomical changes. In effect, that book is the (necessarily clinical) identification guide to Australian reptiles, whilst this latest book provides the intriguing details that underpin the lives of these animals. A superb photographer, Wilson's

prodigious photographic library is used to illustrate all topics in this book.

Chapters explore the fundamentals of lizard natural history: habitat, form and function, senses, thermoregulation, defence, diet, body water management, reproduction, and conservation. Wilson possesses that rare but extremely valuable ability to translate jargon-filled 'hard' science into enjoyable, digestible information. This skill has been honed through his long tenure as the information officer at the Queensland Museum, where he demonstrably keeps abreast of the latest research on Australian reptiles. From correcting problematic terminology (Wilson goes to some length to explain why the term 'cold-blooded' is a poor way to define reptile thermoregulation, when for much of the time reptile blood can be quite warm, and at times warmer than the blood of endotherms), to relating anecdotes about the geckos that inhabit the walls of his own home, Wilson is determined that others not only understand lizards, but that they appreciate their charm, intriguing habits and ecological significance.

One element of this book that particularly appeals to me is the way it places Australian lizards in a global context in terms of convergent evolution—ecological and/or morphological analogues for Australian reptiles from overseas. An intriguing example of this is the pebble-mimicking dragons; Wilson parallels with their New Mexican equivalent the secretive Australian lizards that bear a remarkable resemblance to the rocks in their habitats—camouflage so effective that often the only way the lizards betray their presence is if they actually move! Despite divergent phylogeographic histories, evolution has arrived at the same endpoint on different sides of the planet. I witnessed the same phenomenon on a stony plain in Kazakhstan; the little dragon *Phrynocephalus versicolour* was invisible to my eye—just another stone in a stony landscape—until I forced movement by unknowingly almost stepping on one.



The final chapter (The fate of Australian lizards) is most dear to my heart. After being engrossed in the natural history of Australia's lizard fauna throughout this book, it is fitting to conclude with a sober consideration of the threats facing so many species, and ponder what might be needed to secure their future.

This book has few faults. Rare typographical errors are hard to spot, and too minor to detract from its overall quality. The extensive glossary is useful, and a robust bibliography has references for most of information provided in the text. This is an attractive book that appeals as much to the experienced herpetologist as to the novice.

Nick Clemann

Arthur Rylah Institute for Environmental Research
Department of Sustainability and Environment
PO Box 137, Heidelberg, Victoria 3084